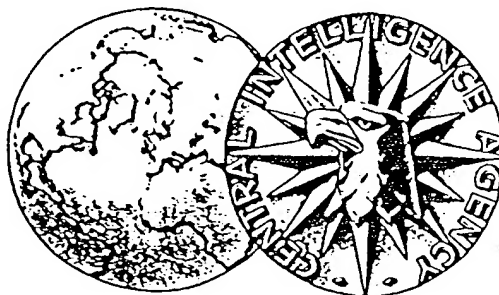


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THE KURDISH MINORITY PROBLEM



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December 1948

THE KURDISH MINORITY PROBLEM

SUMMARY

The almost three million Kurdish tribesmen of Turkey, Iran, Iraq, and Syria constitute a factor of some importance in any strategic estimate of Near East affairs by virtue of their tradition of armed resistance to the governments over them and the efforts the USSR is making to stimulate and capitalize upon their grievances. Because of the narrow tribal loyalties of the Kurds and the rudimentary nature of the Kurdish nationalist movement, a unified attempt to set up an independent state over all of the traditional mountain homeland of "Kurdistan" is unlikely. Nevertheless, the Kurdish tribes can be expected to continue to break out in sporadic local uprisings, and the current activities of Soviet agents indicate that these revolts may follow the lines of the Soviet-sponsored "Kurdish People's Republic," which maintained a brief existence in the Kurdish sector of Iran during 1946. Such revolts, although unlikely to achieve more than temporary independence for their instigators, are capable of furnishing propaganda for the USSR before world opinion and of disrupting operations of Iraq's Mosul oilfields, which are in the Kurdish area. Moreover, the delicate balance of the present Near East state system creates the possibility that a Kurdish revolt, by drawing on security forces and by stimulating other dissident groups, might lead to further disruption of the political and economic stability of that region.

Note: The intelligence organizations of the Departments of State, Army, Navy, and the Air Force have concurred in this report.

The information herein is as of October 1948.

THE KURDISH MINORITY PROBLEM

The mountain tribes known as the Kurds are now and will continue to be a factor of some importance in any strategic estimate of Near East affairs. Possessing a distinctive ethnic strain and a language of their own, the Kurds constitute a fairly compact population group of roughly three million persons. They form the major element of the population in a mountainous area embracing some 150,000 square miles of Turkish, Iranian, Iraqi, and Syrian territory; * this area, although it has never constituted a definite political entity and therefore cannot be precisely defined, has traditionally been known as "Kurdistan," or land of the Kurds.**

The Kurds are worthy of scrutiny chiefly because of the potential threat they present to the internal stability of Iran, Iraq, and, to a lesser extent, Syria, and because of the opportunity they present for Soviet subversive activity. In Turkey, where some one and one-half million Kurds, about half of the total, live, they constitute about seven or eight percent of the population and form the largest minority group. They also represent the most significant minority in Iran, where they number about 600,000, and in Iraq, where the Kurdish population totals about 500,000. An estimated 200,000 Kurds live in northern Syria and in the cities of Damascus and Beirut. Possibly 50,000 Kurds live in the USSR, and there is an insignificant scattering in Afghanistan.

An ancient people noted for their strong tribal loyalty, the Kurds are still mainly nomads who lead a semi-autonomous existence in the mountains of their traditional homeland.*** They are belligerently independent, distrust the governments over them, and have stubbornly resisted efforts to disarm them or restrict in any way their relative freedom.

The Kurds have a long history of rebellion, although they have never been united under a government of their own and even now have only a rudimentary nationalist movement. In Turkey, out of which an autonomous "Kurdistan" was to have been carved under the abortive Treaty of Sèvres (1920), the government is achieving success with a program of assimilation, but it first had to quell three major Kurdish revolts and even now is careful to maintain strong security forces in the Kurdish area. In Iran, Kurdish tribal groups, including the powerful Shikkaks and the Jalalis, waged protracted campaigns against the government during the 1920's and made new attempts to establish their independence in 1941 and 1946. Iraq has been confronted with repeated insurrections by Sheikh Mahmud of Sulaimaniya and by Barzani tribesmen, most recently under Mulla Mustapha, who was finally forced in 1947 to flee with his followers through Iran into the USSR. Although Syria has not had to cope with tribal revolts, Damascus and the nearby Lebanese capital, Beirut, have been centers for Kurdish nationalist agitation.****

* Or approximately the size of Montana.

** See Map and Appendix C, "Kurdistan."

*** See Appendix A, "Kurdish Characteristics and Social Conditions."

**** See Appendix B, "Relations with Parent Governments."

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The USSR has shown a strong interest in stirring up the Kurds ever since the latter part of World War II. It was the moving force behind the short-lived "Kurdish People's Republic" set up in Iran alongside the "Azerbaijan People's Republic" in 1945 and behind a similar "republic" in Iraq which died in the blueprint stage. Soviet agents are currently active in Kurdish Iran, in northern Iraq, and in Beirut, where the Soviet Legation serves as a contact point with Kurdish nationalists and as a base for agents in the tribal areas. Mulla Mustapha is still in the USSR; though he is reportedly not altogether satisfied with his treatment there, he might be used to lead a foray into Iran and Iraq, or as a useful tool in the creation of another puppet Kurdish government.

There is no real prospect for a settlement of Kurdish grievances. The governments of the parent states are doing very little at present to improve the conditions which are the subject of Kurdish complaints, and although they may be impelled to promise the Kurds reforms, there is no indication that they will actually carry them out. The various groups claiming to represent Kurdish nationalist aspirations will undoubtedly continue their appeals to the UN and other international bodies, but it is difficult to foresee how any such organization could materially help the Kurds. Thus, threats of Kurdish rebellions are constantly present, while Kurdish complaints constitute a chronic theme for Soviet propagandists and agitators.

The Kurdish question, as manipulated by Soviet agitation, is a disruptive force which will continue to threaten, sporadically, the delicate balance of the present Near East state system. A successful large-scale Kurdish rebellion is not likely to take place; union of the tribes on an unprecedented scale would be necessary before any Kurdish uprising could achieve genuinely serious proportions, and there is at present no reason to expect any marked lessening of the traditional disunity of the tribes. Nevertheless, except in Turkey, local uprisings may be expected to recur periodically, possibly decked out in the trappings of nationalism along the lines of the "Kurdish People's Republic" in Iran. Such revolts, although unlikely to last more than a year or two at most, are at least capable of furnishing propaganda material for the USSR before world opinion and, of course, the UN; in the case of the Iraqi Kurds, an uprising might result in disruption of operations in the Mosul oilfields. Moreover, the tenuous internal security of such states as Iraq and Iran makes it possible that a Kurdish revolt, by drawing off security forces and stimulating other dissident groups, might lead to further disruption of the political and economic stability of the Near and Middle East.

Further details are set forth in the following attached appendices:

Appendix A—Kurdish Characteristics and Social Conditions

Appendix B—Relations with Parent Governments

Appendix C—"Kurdistan" (with map)

Appendix D—Historical Background

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APPENDIX A

KURDISH CHARACTERISTICS AND SOCIAL CONDITIONS

I. INDIVIDUAL CHARACTERISTICS, LANGUAGE, AND RELIGION.

For centuries the Kurds have lived apart from other population groups, maintaining their own social organization and customs; intermarriage with non-Kurds has been negligible since the Middle Ages. As a result of this social and racial segregation, the Kurds have distinctive personal characteristics and traits. Physically, they are taller than neighboring peoples, and they have a reputation throughout the Near East for exceptional strength and stamina. Particularly in western "Kurdistan," the Kurds are long-headed, and many of them have fair hair and blue eyes, in contrast to most of their neighbors. Individual Kurds give an initial impression of being stolid, taciturn, and even stupid; the men usually appear politically naive. These appearances, however, are deceptive and can probably be attributed to the loneliness and infrequent participation in social affairs which marks the Kurdish herdsman's life. When forced to compete in less isolated environments, Kurds have demonstrated great shrewdness, even when they lacked formal education. Individual Kurds who have been assimilated into surrounding cultures have often achieved great success despite the disadvantage of coming from a minority group—although in so doing they have usually lost touch with their kinsmen. Two notable exceptions are Jelal Baban of Syria and Amanullah Ardalan of Iran, each of whom has held several cabinet posts in his country. The tenacity with which the Kurds have persistently resisted assimilation into more powerful surrounding populations is in itself an indication of their moral stamina.

The Kurds continue to use a language of their own, although many of them, particularly in Turkey and Iran, are now also conversant with the chief language of the country in which they usually reside. Kurdish, an Indo-European tongue which bears some resemblance to Persian, can be broken down into several principal dialects, although actual classification is difficult because of the many variations in the sub-dialects. Despite these differences, however, Kurds using different dialects are usually able to understand one another.

Kurdish is almost entirely a spoken, everyday language which has no literature except for a few songs and poems passed down by word of mouth from generation to generation. There is no Kurdish alphabet, and when the language is written, Arabic (or, less often, Roman) characters are employed. The Kurds as a group are almost completely illiterate,* and although some start has been made in educating the Kurds, the instruction is almost invariably conducted in another language. The use of Kurd-

* For example, in Turkey, where considerable progress in education has been made, the official 1935 statistics for the province of Mardin indicate 93.1 percent illiteracy for males and 99.2 percent for females over the population as a whole, including non-Kurds. Although these figures are high enough, it is significant that Turkey provides no official statistics for some other provinces within Turkish "Kurdistan" which probably had even poorer education facilities than Mardin.

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ish in schools is prohibited in Turkey and Iran, while difficulties arising in part from the absence of any Kurdish alphabet have been the basis of constant Kurdish complaint in Syria, Lebanon, and (to a lesser extent) in Iraq.

Despite their obstinate retention of their own language and social customs, the Kurds were not able to withstand the advance of Islam. Almost all of them are Sunni Moslems—that is, members of that division of Islam which regards the Hadith (Traditions) as well as the Koran as a source of true orthodoxy—and they thus form part of the religious majority in the Islamic world as a whole and in all the countries (except predominantly Shiite Iran) which contain large Kurdish populations. Their religious faith, however, is not deep. Although they engage in such normal Moslem practices as the use of talismans to ward off evil spirits, the employment of mullas (or lay practitioners) to perform marriage and funeral ceremonies, and the memorization by rote of long passages from the Koran, many of their religious usages actually pre-date their conversion to Islam. They are unlikely to join any cause primarily on religious grounds.

2. ECONOMIC LIFE.

The economic pattern of Kurdish life has scarcely changed during the entire period of recorded history. Some of the tribes have settled down to a primitive exploitation of the soil in one locality. Most of them are, however, like their ancestors, nomadic herdsmen who migrate back and forth with their sheep and goats from the high summer pasturages to the more sheltered mountain valleys used in the winter, living in tents and carrying all of their accumulated paraphernalia on their camels, donkeys, and horses and on their own backs. Except as they are able, from time to time, to obtain such items as salt, utensils, weapons, and bits of clothing from others, the nomads supply all of their material needs themselves. They often supplement their food supply by planting small vegetable or cereal crops to be harvested before the next migration, and they occasionally plunder settled communities while on the march. Whatever the success of such raids, however, the life of the nomadic Kurds is a hard one which yields barely enough for subsistence. From birth to death the Kurdish herdsman is continually faced with disease, filth, wet, and cold, and his native costume is only too often nothing more than a few rags swathed around his body in traditional fashion.

The settled Kurds live in similarly strained economic circumstances, although they depend less on livestock and more on cultivation than do their nomadic kinsmen. They are able to obtain salt, utensils, clothing, and other articles through the sale of brush or charcoal, tobacco, rugs, honey, nuts, and garden products. The yield of the land to its cultivators is limited, however, by the poor soil and almost chronic drought which usually prevail and by the fact that the land is usually owned by an absentee landlord who takes much of the crop yield himself.

3. THE IMPORTANCE OF THE TRIBE.

The tribe, usually ruled by a single leader with the advice of the tribal elders, is the basic unit of Kurdish economic and social life. The nomadic Kurds move as tribal units in their semi-annual treks between summer and winter encampments, leaving

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behind a small number of individuals designated to tend or guard the land. The settled Kurds, although more exposed to outside influence and more likely to move away into non-Kurdish areas than are their nomadic kinsmen, remain subject to tribal jurisdiction; the influence of the community is strong, and, in addition, the Kurdish peasant usually has an agha, or notable, of the tribe as his landlord.

The Kurds are individually subject to the laws of the countries in which they reside. In practice, however, the maintenance of order, like the making of social and economic decisions, is normally carried on by the tribal community, on the basis of unwritten tribal law. Because of the remoteness of the Kurdish tribal areas, law-enforcement machinery is often unavailable, and to a certain extent the civil authorities themselves recognize tribal jurisdiction and tribal law as binding. Even when this is not the case, the Kurds view the civil courts with a distrust that is often justified. As a result, the Kurds tend to mete out justice and settle disputes themselves, through the medium of primitive open courts in which the tribal elders act as judges. Disputes between sub-tribes are handled through negotiations between the tribal leaders or through arbitration.

Strong tribal loyalties are carefully nurtured. Individuality is discouraged in Kurdish youth from an early age as being detrimental to the well-being of the tribal community. The adult Kurd identifies himself almost exclusively with the tribe in which he engages in the struggle for existence; he has only a shallow comprehension of being, for example, a Turk or Iranian or Iraqi—or even of having any loyalty to the Kurdish people as a whole. Because of this independent, self-sufficient attitude, disagreements between Kurdish tribes—perhaps over the use of grazing lands or over a sheep-stealing incident—are likely to remain unsettled, forming a basis for lingering hatred.

4. MILITARY CAPABILITIES.

Like most nomadic peoples, the Kurds have a strong martial tradition. The Kurdish boy begins to wear a dagger before he reaches his teens and becomes an adept rifleman during his adolescence. The rifle is the adult Kurd's most prized possession; it is not only useful in hunting, sheep-stealing, and the protection of tribal independence, but also serves as a symbol of manhood, independence, and tribal prestige.

Kurdish belligerency is most evident among the purely nomadic tribes. Again and again they have resisted attempts to restrain their raiding habits or otherwise exercise greater control over them, and despite periodic attempts by the civil authority to disarm them they have mysteriously almost always been able to acquire new weapons. Although their armament is limited to individual weapons (and sometimes machine guns), these tribesmen are effective guerrilla fighters in their own mountain areas and have frequently defeated more heavily equipped government forces by virtue of their superior knowledge of the terrain and their ability to scatter and disappear when confronted with superior forces. Outside of their mountains, the Kurds are handicapped by the limits which narrow tribal loyalties place on the size of the forces they can muster

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and by the greater effectiveness with which the heavier weapons of governmental security forces can be employed against them. Even if they are temporarily quelled, however, they can flee to their own mountain fastnesses (perhaps crossing international boundaries to halt the pursuit) and can remain there, quiet but unsubdued, until the next opportunity for a foray arises.

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APPENDIX B

RELATIONS WITH PARENT GOVERNMENTS

1. INTRODUCTION.

The Kurds as a whole have almost always been subject to the rule of outside governments. In the seventeenth century Persia and the Ottoman Empire between them absorbed all of "Kurdistan," thus wiping out the last of the small, temporarily unsubdued Kurdish "states" which had grown up there. In the early nineteenth century, when Turkey was preoccupied with the revolt of Egypt, the Kurdish tribes rebelled under Russian encouragement, and for almost two decades they succeeded in maintaining their independence throughout a large area centering on Mosul. These Kurdish principalities were suppressed in 1847, however, and when half a century later a confederation of Kurdish tribes known as the Milli threatened Turkish sovereignty over their tribal lands, the Turks succeeded in suppressing it by showering its leader, Ibrahim Pasha, with rank and privilege. In World War I, despite some defections to the Russian side, large numbers of Kurds (from Iran as well as Turkey) fought as members of the Ottoman Army.

The collapse of the Ottoman Empire at the end of World War I encouraged many Kurds to agitate for independence, and in the Treaty of Sèvres (1920) the victorious Allies included provisions for an autonomous "Kurdistan" as part of their plan to partition the "sick man of Europe" almost out of existence.* Implementation of the Treaty of Sèvres, however, was prevented by the rise of Turkish nationalism under Mustafa Kemal (Ataturk) and Turkey's armed resistance to the dismemberment of Anatolia. In the Treaty of Lausanne (1923), which formally terminated Turkey's successful military campaign, the idea of Kurdish autonomy was dropped. Parts of the Kurdish homeland passed to the jurisdiction of the newly created mandates of Mesopotamia (Iraq) and Syria. More than half remained under Turkey and Iran.

The subsequent history of the Kurds must be treated country by country. The Kurds have continued to think and act as members of a particular tribe rather than as "Turks" or "Iraqis," and their revolts have sometimes been carried on across international boundaries. Nevertheless, the problem of controlling them or trying to assimilate them has been a different one in each of the countries concerned.

* Article 62 of the treaty called for preparations for the establishment of Kurdish autonomy "for the districts predominantly Kurdish, situated east of the Euphrates, to the south of the southern frontier of Armenia which is to be determined later, and to the north of the Turco-Syrian-Mesopotamian frontier." Article 64 of the treaty provided that the Kurds of the Vilayet (Province) of Mosul, which was allocated to the Mandate of Mesopotamia, would be permitted to join the new state of Kurdistan provided that they demonstrated to the League of Nations that a majority of the population wanted and was capable of self-government.

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2. RELATIONS WITH TURKEY.

After Turkey's exchange of populations with Greece during the early 1920's the Kurds constituted the largest non-Turkish group in the republic. The Kurdish sheikhs and aghas, realizing that their ranks, titles, wealth, and feudal privileges were jeopardized by Mustafa Kemal's new regime, led repeated revolts. More than a decade passed before they were pacified.

The first major uprising did not take place until 1925, after the Ankara Government had abolished the Caliphate, and it drew upon religious feeling as well as the "incoherent nationalism" which had been disappointed by the Treaty of Lausanne. Led by a Kurdish religious notable, Sheikh Said, the 1925 rebellion called for the proclamation of a new Sultan-Caliph and the re-establishment of the Shariah, or Koranic law, which the Turkish Republic had replaced with Western civil codes. The Kurdish candidate for the Sultanate was a prince of the deposed imperial house of Osman, a son of Sultan Abdul Hamit II, who had for his own purposes treated the Kurds well.

This rebellion, which took place in southern and eastern Turkey, was firmly suppressed by Mustafa Kemal, and Sheikh Said and other leaders were executed. Soon thereafter, however, a second uprising, led by Ihsan Nuri and supported by Kurds in Iran and Syria, took place in the Agri Dag (Mount Ararat) region. Its ostensible purpose was to protest against the abolition of the fez and the wearing of "Christian" hats in Turkey. After allowing the "fez revolt" to drag out for almost three years, Turkey finally stifled it in a campaign of great ruthlessness. Ihsan Nuri himself managed to escape into Iran with many of his followers, however, and other Kurds who had attempted a diversionary attack from Syria were able to get back across the border.

The last major Kurdish revolt against Turkey took place in 1937 in Tunceli, a province of the Dersim region. This time the Turkish Government lost no time in crushing the rebellion. Sayit Riza, the Alouite religious leader who had instigated the revolt, was hanged along with a number of his followers, and the government's victory was followed by enactment of the famous "Tunceli Law," which provided rigid military controls over Kurdish-inhabited territory.

Since 1937 the Turkish Government has kept a strict watch over the Kurdish areas and, while doing so, has worked assiduously to assimilate the Kurds. Turkish policy is based on the concept that "there is no Kurdish problem, and there are no Kurds." In official usage, the Kurds are "mountain Turks" who theoretically possess all the privileges which are the constitutional birthright of every Turkish national. The teaching of Kurdish is prohibited, and primary schools are being set up in which Kurdish children are taught to speak Turkish. Roads and railroads have been constructed in the Kurdish areas, not only to facilitate administration and military control, but in an honest effort to raise the Kurdish standard of living; the major railroad construction currently in progress in Turkey is on a line which will eventually run through the heart of Turkish "Kurdistan," from Elazig eastward to Qutur in Iran, by way of Mus and Lake Van. Kurds who resist assimilation have been transported to the western, non-Kurdish provinces and resettled, a few at a time, in widely scattered villages. At the

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same time, Turks from western Anatolia, and more particularly immigrant Moslem Turks, are encouraged to settle in "Kurdish" territory.

These policies have proved so successful that the government in December 1946 felt justified in repealing the "Tunceli Law," the most drastic of its measures for restraining the Kurds. Many Kurds who had been moved westward are now permitted to return to their homeland. For more than a decade no new uprisings have taken place, and the Turkish Kurds, already somewhat more prosperous than their brethren in neighboring countries, have proved far less susceptible to anti-government or nationalistic propaganda from abroad. The adherence of the Kurds in Turkey to a revitalized Kurdish nationalist movement is far from assured. The process of "Turkification," moreover, will probably be accelerated as the construction of Turkish schools and the government's measures for economic development continue. In particular, the discovery of petroleum deposits at Raman Dağ, along the upper reaches of the Tigris River, could conceivably lead to a new era of prosperity for Turkish "Kurdistan."

3. RELATIONS WITH IRAN.

The Kurds of Iran have repeatedly attempted to shake off the central government's authority. In the confusion which permeated the Middle East at the close of World War I, two Kurds of the Shikkak tribe, Ismael Agha (better known by his nickname of Simitko or Simko) and Ammar Khan, succeeded in dominating a wide stretch of north-western Iran for four years before their defeat by an Iranian Army force in 1922. Another rebellious Kurdish leader, Jafar Sultan, was able to maintain some measure of independence until 1925.

Reza Shah's dictatorial government succeeded in controlling the Kurds during the remainder of the period between the two World Wars, by virtue of the strong military posts it set up throughout the Kurdish area, but the collapse of Reza Shah's authority in September 1941, when Soviet and British troops simultaneously occupied Iran, was followed by a new flareup of the Kurdish tribes. This revolt proved short-lived, however; the tribes and sub-tribes concerned showed a lack of cohesiveness, and the USSR, apparently unprepared to sponsor a Kurdish state, used its military control over most of the Kurdish area to restore order.

A new opportunity for Kurdish autonomist aspirations arose in late 1945, when the USSR undertook active steps at least partially to dismember Iran before its occupation troops left. Soviet preparations for establishment of a puppet state in Azerbaijan* were paralleled in the Kurdish area to the immediate south; a Kurdish Democratic Party was organized under a prominent and wealthy Kurd of Mehabad, Qazi Mohammed, while Ammar Khan, hero of the 1918-22 revolt and probably the most influential Kurdish tribal leader in Iran, was induced to lend the support of his Shikkak tribesmen. Early in 1946, following proclamation of the new regime in Azerbaijan, Qazi Mohammed announced the establishment of a "Kurdish People's Republic," with its capital at Mehabad. The Qazi was president of the "Republic," and Haji Baba Sheikh, a Mehabad mulla, headed the National Assembly. A Kurdish People's Army was

* The alternate spelling "Azerbaidzhan" is used on the attached map.

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formed under Soviet auspices with the support or consent of Begzadeh, Jalali, Herki, and other Kurdish tribes, and Radio Mehabad and a Kurdish newspaper were established under Soviet guidance to back the new state.

The Mehabad Kurdish state, which was probably intended to be the nucleus of a greater "Kurdistan," lasted only a few months. Rivalry with the "People's Republic of Azerbaijan" was a major cause of friction. The Mehabad Government's claims to jurisdiction over all Iranian territory west of Saqqiz, from the Soviet border south to Miyan-duab, conflicted in large measure with the claims of the Azerbaijan Government, and the Mehabad Kurds were irritated by the special favor with which the Soviet Army and Soviet agents treated the Azerbaijan regime. Of increasingly greater importance, however, was Kurdish disillusionment over Soviet methods and unfulfilled promises and the impression made by US firmness against the USSR's expansionism. Ammar Khan soon became openly hostile to both the USSR and the Democratic Party leadership, and Qazi Mohammed lost influence rapidly as other tribal chieftains joined the Shikkak opposition. Prime Minister Qavam hastened the disintegration of the Kurdish state by promising the Kurds favorable treatment if they cooperated with his efforts to re-establish the central government's authority. In December 1946, after the Soviet Army had withdrawn, Iranian forces marched into both Azerbaijan and "Kurdistan," and the two rebel governments collapsed. While the Azerbaijan leader, Pishavari, escaped into the USSR, Qazi Mohammed surrendered and, with his brother and his cousin, was later executed.

The government's victory was marred, however, by the presence in Iran of the Iraqi Kurdish leader, Mulla Mustapha, and his Barzani tribesmen. The Barzanis, who had fled into Iran in October 1945, seized an arsenal at Mehabad abandoned by Qazi Mohammed and refused either to relinquish the arms as a condition to being settled on Iranian Government territory or to return to Iraq, where Mulla Mustapha and 110 other leaders had been condemned to death. The Barzanis, who were aided by Herki Kurds and Assyrians under Zero Beg, were finally driven back into Iraq by Iranian troops supported by loyalist Kurdish tribesmen, but the doughty Mulla Mustapha thereupon recrossed the frontier with several hundred followers and succeeded in working his way north to the USSR, where he remains under Soviet protection.

Major clashes between Kurds and government forces have been lacking since the dramatic escape of the Barzanis, but the Kurds remain restive under Iranian rule. Although the loyalist Kurdish leaders were feted and bemedalled in Tehran following the fall of the Mehabad regime, the Iranian Government has shown no real interest in dealing with Kurdish grievances. Kurdish leaders feel that they are inadequately represented in the Iranian Majlis in comparison with non-Kurdish tribal groups such as the Bakhtiaris, the Qashquais, and the Turcomans, and the Kurds have a deep distrust for the corrupt and lethargic provincial and military officials with whom they must deal. The appointment in 1947 of Marshal Shahbakhti, an old enemy of the Kurds, as military governor of Azerbaijan only increased Kurdish dissatisfaction over the government's failure to improve conditions in Azerbaijan. The continuing threat of a Soviet attack has also contributed to Kurdish apprehension regarding the future,

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particularly in view of government attempts to disarm the tribes and Kurdish lack of confidence in the Iranian Army's ability to resist foreign aggression.

Nevertheless, despite the existence of some active disaffection among the Kurds, notably in the Jalali and Herki tribes, the Kurds have recently tended to fall in with the Iranian Army's program for harnessing tribal support against Soviet penetration. A number of Kurdish leaders lost what confidence they had in the USSR as a result of the "People's Republic" fiasco, and although there is much evidence of Soviet subversive work in the Kurdish area, at present many Kurds are likely to offer resistance to any pro-Soviet tendencies among the more disaffected tribesmen.

4. RELATIONS WITH IRAQ.

The Kurds have fared somewhat better in Iraq than in other countries. They are represented in both the Senate and the Chamber of Deputies, and usually have some representation in the cabinet. Iraq's constitution authorizes the use of the Kurdish language in the schools. Nevertheless, the large Kurdish population of northern Iraq feels restricted by its minority status and has repeatedly resisted government controls.

Kurdish uprisings have centered about three leading personalities: Sheikh Mahmud of Sulaimaniya and two brothers of the Barzani tribe, Sheikh Ahmad and Mulla Mustapha. Sheikh Mahmud enjoyed considerable independence from World War I until the Mosul boundary dispute between Turkey and British-controlled Iraq was settled by the Treaty of Ankara in 1926, and he later led a number of campaigns against government forces, in which he returned to his chief base of Sulaimaniya several times after having been driven out by government forces. More recently, in 1941, he unsuccessfully attempted to take advantage of the confusion resulting from the German-supported Rashid Ali al-Gailani coup against the government.

The first of the major Barzani revolts took place in 1931, when Sheikh Ahmad, after announcing his conversion to Christianity, succeeded in defeating a number of other Kurdish tribes as well as regular Iraqi troops before he was defeated by British air attack and forced to flee into Turkey. Leadership of Barzani dissidents has since passed to his irrepressible brother, Mulla Mustapha. Mulla Mustapha waged a series of campaigns against the government's forces from 1943 to October 1945, when he was forced to flee with thousands of his followers into Iran. As noted above (page 10) Mulla Mustapha was driven temporarily back into Iraq, after he had refused to accept the alternative terms offered him by the Iranian Government, but then managed to escape back through Iran into the USSR. Although some of his followers have since returned individually to Iraq, they have been settled in widely separated areas. No major clashes between the Iraqi Army and the Kurds have taken place since 1945 and, when the Palestine War broke out in 1948, Iraq was willing to risk stripping its Kurdish areas of their normal garrisons in order to support the more urgent Arab needs.

In 1946, at the time of the Iranian "Kurdish People's Republic," several Iraqi Kurdish factions formed a Kurdish People's Party, with Mulla Mustapha's blessing, for the purpose of setting up a Federal Kurdish State within Iraq. The party soon disappeared, however, apparently without doing anything beyond setting up its prospectus.

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5. RELATIONS WITH SYRIA AND LEBANON.

The Kurds constitute a relatively small minority in Syria and Lebanon. Kurdish communities of long standing are located in the Kurd Dagh area of northwestern Syria, but the largest concentration is in the Jazirah section of northeastern Syria, where a considerable number of Kurdish immigrants settled after the collapse of the Ottoman Empire. Small but politically active Kurdish communities exist in Damascus and Beirut.

The Kurds, along with other minorities, are accorded equal rights and privileges with the majority groups in Syria and Lebanon. They have parliamentary representation and generally concede that they have received fair treatment in such matters as road-building, construction of schools, and administration of justice. Nevertheless, many of them feel that their integrity as a group is in jeopardy. This feeling is most noticeable in Beirut and Damascus, which have become centers of Kurdish nationalist propaganda, and among the non-native immigrant Kurds, who have retained their traditional hatred of alien domination. The immigrant group has provided most of the leaders of the Syrian and Lebanese Kurds, notably the Badr Khan family, Dr. Ahmad Nazif, and Hassan Hajo Agha.

The principal Kurdish grievance is that the Syrian system of administering minorities, although somewhat less strict than that of the French mandate, continues to be based primarily on religious rather than ethnic distinctions. This groups the Kurds with the Sunni Arabs instead of giving them a special status. The more politically conscious Kurds are equally concerned, however, by the basic tendency of Syrian minority policy toward ultimately eliminating the minority concept entirely in favor of an all-inclusive secular nationalism. Convinced that they cannot halt this process of assimilation without outside assistance, these Kurds have tended to regard the creation of an independent "Kurdistan" as their only salvation. The area to be included in such a state is variously defined. In all cases, however, it included portions of Turkey, Iraq, and Iran, as well as Syria, and the supposition is made that a unified Kurdish movement for independence must exist in all four countries.

6. KURDISH NATIONALISM AND THE USSR.

Efforts to encourage a genuine Kurdish nationalism, as distinct from the resentment of outside authority felt by the tribes, have been made ever since the middle of the nineteenth century. The Kurdish nationalist movement, however, has remained small and disunited and has been dominated by a relatively limited number of conspirators and agitators.

Beginning in 1880, when Sheikh Obeidullah's clandestine Kurdish League was formed to promote an independent Kurdish state west of Lake Urmia, the secret society has been a characteristic vehicle for Kurdish aspirations. The Ottoman Government soon suppressed the League through the simple expedient of banishing the Sheikh, however, and the League's numerous successors have never succeeded in growing powerful, because of internal dissension as well as governmental efforts to suppress them.

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Little is known of the three most prominent Kurdish secret societies of recent years: the Khoybun Society, which has operated in Syria and (to a lesser extent) Turkey since the early 1920's; the Komalla Kurd (formally the "Jiana"—or Young Kurd Society) in Iraq and Iran, which in 1945 was reported as pro-Soviet, and the Hewa Kurd in Iraq. The Khoybun, which had been set up to agitate for an independent "Kurdistan," ceased during World War II its active cooperation with its Armenian counterpart. The Hewa Kurd organization appears to be primarily a student agitation group which has no plans for direct action.

In addition to the conspiratorial organizations, a large number of more or less open organizations have sprung up, particularly in Syria and Lebanon, to agitate for Kurdish independence. Such organizations have been active in presenting petitions and demands for Kurdish independence to international bodies ever since the Sèvres deliberations of 1920; many such petitions were presented to the Allied powers and to the UN during and immediately after World War II.

Some disjointed efforts have also been made to establish Kurdish-language newspapers and magazines in an effort to encourage a Kurdish literature and spread nationalist propaganda. The Badr Khan family of Syria, for example, has backed a periodical called "Kurdistan," which was published by Midhat Beg Badr Khan successively in Cairo, Geneva, and London before being taken over by his nephew, Suraya Beg. Such publications, which must necessarily be printed in Arabic or Roman characters because of the absence of a Kurdish alphabet, have had an obviously limited appeal in view of the illiteracy of the great mass of Kurds.

Although Kurdish nationalists have shown, through their many appeals to international bodies, that they feel outside support to be necessary, the USSR alone has taken an active interest in the Kurds, and then only after long neglect. The 50,000 Kurds in the USSR, like other minorities, were permitted to have their own schools and publications and to form separate units in the Soviet Army, but for many years the USSR has not used its Kurds, as it did its Armenians, as a lure to related groups outside its borders.

Soviet efforts to win Kurdish support began during World War II and show every indication of continuing. In Iran, despite the failure of the Soviet-supported "Kurdish People's Republic," the USSR has continued its agitation: the recent opening of Soviet consulates at Rizaiyeh, near Lake Urmia, and at Maku, in the Jalali Kurd area, was obviously connected with such activity. Another center of Soviet activity is the Soviet Legation in Beirut, which has maintained contact with Kurdish nationalists in the Levant and has sent out agents to the Kurdish tribal areas. Recent reports have emphasized Soviet efforts among the Kurds of northern Iraq. Meanwhile, the USSR continues to harbor Mulla Mustapha's remaining Barzani Kurds, who are presumably being kept in readiness for a foray, perhaps with Soviet support, into Iran and Iraq, or as a nucleus for the formation of a new puppet Kurdish state. There is good evidence, however, that Kurds who have been given sanctuary in the USSR are not content with their shabby treatment there, and disillusionment lingers among Kurds in Iran over the Soviet failure to fulfil promises in 1946.

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Thus far the USSR appears to have achieved some success with the numerically weak Kurdish nationalist groups. Some of the appeals for Kurdish autonomy made in the last few years have been Communistic in tone, as, for example, that presented to the UN in January 1946 by the Kurdish Rizgari Party of Iraq.

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APPENDIX C

"KURDISTAN"

1. GENERAL.

The name "Kurdistan," meaning "country of the Kurds," is used to designate a large area of southeastern Turkey, northwest Iran, northern Iraq, and northern Syria, in which the Kurds form the preponderant element in the population. The term is a nebulous one. The boundaries of "Kurdistan" cannot be defined closely on historical grounds because the area has never been a definite political entity. Precise determination of the ethnic limits of "Kurdistan" is made difficult by the nomadic habits of many Kurdish tribes and by the overlapping of Kurdish and non-Kurdish population groups in many areas. Although the great majority of the Kurdish people live within "Kurdistan," giving the term some ethnic meaning, numerous individuals, groups, and colonies of Kurds live outside its boundaries.

The geographical distribution of Kurds, both within and without what is generally regarded as "Kurdistan," is listed below by country. No reliable basis exists for estimating the numerical strength of the Kurdish population, and the figures used in this study, totalling 2,850,000, must be accepted with great reserve.

2. TURKEY.

The Turkish policy of breaking up agglomerations of Kurds and settling them in groups of very small numbers in western Anatolia, despite recent reversals of that policy, has decreased the total number of Kurds in Turkish "Kurdistan." The great majority of the estimated 1,500,000 Kurds in Turkey (out of a total 1945 population of 18,871,203) still live in southeastern Turkey, south and east of a line drawn from the USSR border through Kars, Erzurum, Erzincan, Malatya, Maraş, and Gaziantep to the border of Syria.

3. IRAN.

The majority of Kurds in Iran live in the area adjacent to the borders of Iraq and Turkey, across which seasonal nomadic migration normally takes place. Territorial overlapping of Kurds with the largely Turki-speaking population of Iranian Azerbaijan and also with Lur tribes makes definition of Iranian "Kurdistan" difficult. Generally speaking, however, the Kurdish area may be taken to include all territory within a tentative line which begins at the Turkish border on the lower slopes of Ağrı Dağ (Mount Ararat), follows the west and south shores of Lake Urmia, roughly encircles Miyanduab and Kangavar, including Kermanshah and Sinneh, and meets the Iraq border south of Khanaqin. Kurds are also found living among other peoples in an area stretching southward from this tentative line toward the Persian Gulf, and Kurds are found elsewhere in Iran, particularly in the northeast. In the absence of reliable

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population statistics for Iran, the number of Iranian Kurds is roughly estimated to be somewhat more than 600,000, out of a total population of upwards of 14,000,000.

4. IRAQ.

"Kurdistan" in Iraq may be generally described as comprising the territory east of the Tigris River and north of a line running westward from the vicinity of Mandali to the Tigris River just south of the point where the Little Zab River joins it. Subject to seasonal migrations in and out of Iraq by the nomad tribes, the Kurds in Iraq are estimated to number less than 500,000 out of an estimated 1947 total population of 4,799,500.

5. SYRIA AND LEBANON.

The Kurds in Syria live chiefly along the northern border and particularly in Jazirah, a large province in the northeast bordering Turkey and Iraq. There are also Kurds in Damascus and Beirut. A fairly recent estimate gives the number of Kurds in the two countries as "perhaps" 200,000, out of a total population of 2,860,411 (Syria) and 1,126,601 (Lebanon). All but a few thousand of these Kurds live in Syria.

6. OTHER KURDISH COMMUNITIES.

Most of the Kurds living outside the four chief parent states are in the USSR, chiefly in the Armenian and Azerbaijan Soviet Socialist Republics. Perhaps 50,000 Kurds are on Soviet soil, although available estimates are even less consistent and reliable than those for the other parent states.

An insignificant number of Kurds live in Afghanistan.

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APPENDIX D

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The Kurds constitute one of the oldest peoples now existing in the Near East. They are referred to, by such names as Guti and Kurtie, in inscriptions which date back several thousand years. Early Greek historians and geographers, including Strabo and Xenophon, mentioned people who appear to have been the Kurds and in some instances described them as living within the borders of what is now considered "Kurdistan." The name "Kurd" has been used by Arab writers ever since the ninth century.

Despite their ancient lineage, little is known about the history of the Kurds before the Arab conquests of the ninth century. At that time Kurds fought with Iranians against the Arab advance, and Kurdish conscripts, although sometimes rebellious, are recorded as having fought in the Arab armies. Later a number of tribal chieftains set up small, independent Kurdish states around such centers as Khurramabad in Iran, Ruwandiz and Sulaimaniya in Iraq, and Diyarbakir and Urfa in Turkey. The most famous of these warrior kings was Salah-al-Din (1146-1174)—the "Saladin" who so enthusiastically and successfully organized Islamic resistance to the Christian crusaders. At the height of his power, Salah-al-Din ruled not only northeastern Iraq, where the Ayyub dynasty of which he was a member originated, but Syria and Egypt as well.

Except for Salah-al-Din, however, the Kurdish chieftains ruled over very restricted territories, and the few dynasties which attained local independence were unable to maintain it. "Kurdistan" was a battleground in the centuries of strife between Persia and the expanding empire of the Ottoman Turks, and by the end of the seventeenth century the last of the Kurdish princes had succumbed to one or the other of the two antagonists. The Kurds thereafter were a subject people whose local revolts were unsuccessful in long restoring even partial Kurdish political independence.

The Kurds have preserved a remarkably high degree of ethnic purity. In Assyrian times their territories in the vicinity of Lake Van and Lake Urmia were subjected to successive invasions from almost every direction, but the inaccessibility of their mountain fastnesses enabled them to avoid close contact with the conquerors' hordes. Later the Medes, whose conquests extended over and far beyond "Kurdistan," may have made some contribution to the Kurdish ethnic strain, and during the succeeding centuries some admixture of Caucasian, Armenoid, Iranian, and finally Arab blood probably took place, especially along the periphery of "Kurdistan." In more recent times, however, during the centuries of Ottoman suzerainty over the great majority of the Kurds, intermarriage between Kurds and other groups was probably negligible, and the Kurds of present-day Turkey show little evidence of any Turkish ancestry. Even under Turkey's present republican regime, which strongly favors assimilation of the "mountain Turks," mixed marriages are most uncommon.

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